



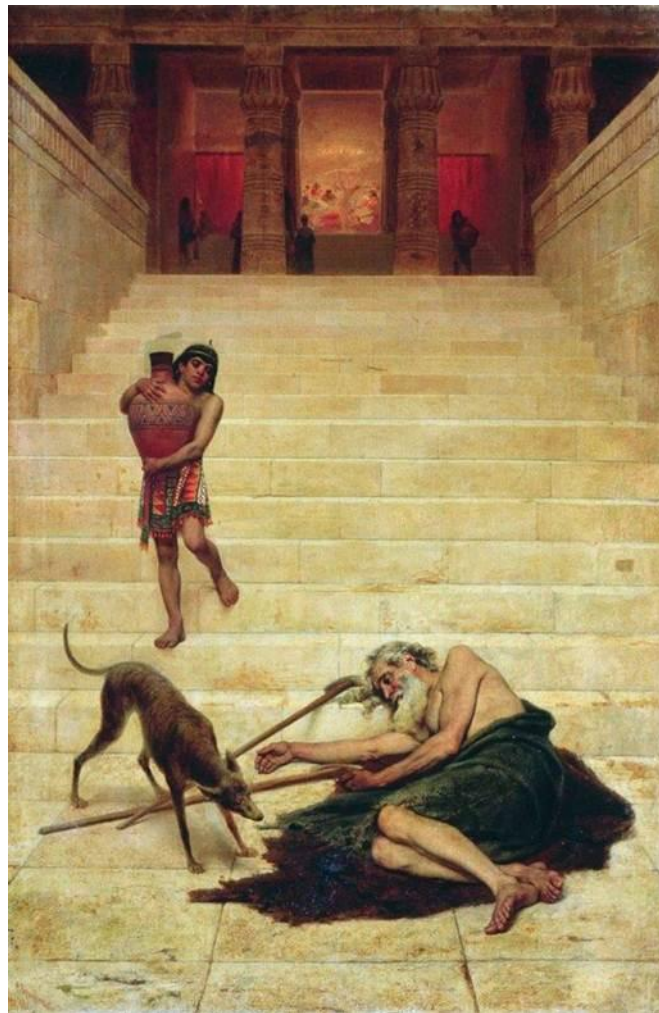
Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time | Year C



Fedor Bronnikov, Lazarus and Dives. 1886.



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Prayer for Generosity

St. Ignatius of Loyola

*Eternal Word,
only begotten Son of God,
Teach me true generosity.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve.
To give without counting the cost,
To fight heedless of wounds,
To labor without seeking rest,
To sacrifice myself without thought of any reward
Save the knowledge that I have done your will.
Amen.*

**Catholic
Faith, Life
& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ The Gospels of these weeks are from the section of Luke's Gospel that takes place "on the way to Jerusalem." It is a journey every Christian must take.
- ▶ Last week the liturgy focused on the proper use of money. That focus continues today.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First reading: Amos 6, 1. 4-7

- ▶ We hear from the prophet Amos again this week.
- ▶ Disciples of the prophet Amos are probably the authors of the book bearing his name. Their intention was to record his prophetic utterances for the sake of future generations.
- ▶ The prophetic book was written in the southern kingdom, Judah, probably after the fall of the northern kingdom, Israel @ 722 B.C.E.
- ▶ Amos was a dresser of sycamore trees from the nomadic community called Tekoa. Amos was an outdoorsman. The images and metaphors he used to describe the spiritual life reflect his love of nature.
- ▶ Amos left Judah to address the imminent invasion of the northern kingdom. Amos called for repentance in the face of sure defeat. He insisted that the situation they faced was a result of Israel's sin. They must repent of their unfaithfulness to God.
- ▶ Amos spoke with profound authority.
- ▶ Amos not only addresses the sins of the people of the northern kingdom Israel, he uses the situation to address the sin of Judah in the south as well.
- ▶ Today's section of Amos is concerned with the disintegration of Israel—their social and spiritual bankruptcy.
- ▶ This section of Amos focuses its attention on the reason for God's pending judgment against Israel. Amos railed against a people who celebrated public liturgy and sacrifices yet failed in their divinely ordained responsibility to care for the poor and oppressed among them.
- ▶ The rich lived as though they and they alone were responsible for their own wealth. They did nothing to secure the future and nothing to meet the needs of the poor. Their arrogant self-sufficiency was an affront to God.
- ▶ The people arrogantly believed that they were righteous in the eyes of God and that God would ensure their victory against foreign enemies. They were sure the *Day of the Lord* would come—the day when God would definitively enter their history—and bring them to victory.
- ▶ Amos challenged their denial. How in the world did they expect God to act on

their behalf in the face of disobedience and unfaithfulness? The *Day of the Lord* would come with a vengeance, but Israel would certainly not be its beneficiary.

- ▶ Was Amos prophesying Israel's inevitable judgment and demise or was there still time to repent and avoid destruction?
- ▶ There was reason to hope. A few faithful disciples of the Lord—a faithful remnant would survive the onslaught that was coming.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ If Amos were living today what would he prophecy/preach to the people of our country?
- ▶ Do you believe that God causes war as a punishment for sin?
- ▶ What is Amos' challenge to the rich? What would Amos say needs to change in the hearts of the rich?
- ▶ What are the implications for the liturgy we celebrate? What are we to learn from this reading?
- ▶ What is the challenge to us who are rich in comparison with so many of the world's abject poor?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about our response to the poor and oppressed in our midst?

Second Reading: 1 Timothy 6, 11-16

- ▶ Today's reading from 1 Timothy continues the author's catechism on what it means to live in God's kingdom.
- ▶ The pericope refers to the noble profession of faith. It is a reference to the profession of faith that is made at baptism.
- ▶ The reference is a reminder to believers that baptism strengthens us and empowers us to live the Christian life.
- ▶ Believers are to be steadfast in faith and loyal believers until Christ's return.
- ▶ When we profess faith in Christ at baptism we profess our immersion into Christ's life, death and resurrection. Christ strengthens us to join our daily dying and rising to his own and thus persevere until the end of life.
- ▶ The pericope closes with a beautiful hymn of praise to the Lord of Lords who is our hope, our salvation and the object of our life's mission.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ In what way, if any, is this letter a relevant letter today?
- ▶ What does it mean when you make a profession of faith in something? What does that profession require of you? What are the implications?
- ▶ What does it mean to you to join your daily dying and risings to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Share with one other person what you believe in your heart about Jesus Christ.

Gospel: Luke 16, 19-31

- ▶ Two things are unique to this parable. The primary character is called by name and the afterlife is described.
- ▶ While wealth and poverty are primary themes, Luke also uses this parable to evangelize people about the resurrection of Christ.
- ▶ There are two principle characters in the parable--the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man is wearing the color purple, the color of royalty, the color that sets the man apart as among the most elite of society.
- ▶ The rich man's banquet is a feast fit for royalty—a feast that should occur only for the most important occasions, but which in fact is celebrated every day.
- ▶ The rich man's over-indulgent wealth is contrasted with Lazarus' extreme poverty. Lazarus owns nothing but his name that means, “he whom God helps”.
- ▶ The rich man possessed disgusting wealth; the poor man possessed nothing but a name that echoed God's providential care and hope for God's assistance in time of need.
- ▶ Lazarus was a beggar. Beggars were considered sinners and deserving of their plight. A common belief of first century Hebrews was the belief that poverty was the result of God's punishment for sin. If a person was poor, it was his or her sin or the sin of the parents that was responsible. Poverty was considered just punishment for sin.
- ▶ The locus of the parable is an important consideration. Lazarus is outside the gate, and the rich man is on the inside. Lazarus has no way to secure the world's material goods.
- ▶ The rich man is in the customary cultural role of patron and Lazarus is the client. The gate is the entrance. The rich man has control of the gate; he chooses whether he will let his client enter or not.
- ▶ Will he let Lazarus enter and thus eat the scraps that drop from his lavish banquet table?
- ▶ First century society was a society of limited goods. There were only so many

material goods to go around. All goods had already been distributed. The only way to get more of the world's resources was if those who had more shared with those who had less.

- ▶ Lazarus is so impoverished that even the dogs lick his sores (dogs were loathed in the ancient world).
- ▶ Lazarus dies before he can even perform the only role he can perform—that of beggar. At least as beggar he offers the patron the opportunity to fulfill his almsgiving responsibility.
- ▶ The hook in the story for listeners comes when Lazarus dies before the client/patron role is clearly established.
- ▶ Poor Lazarus was not even given a proper burial—another scandal to listeners of this parable.
- ▶ The story truly becomes enticing when all expectations are definitively overturned and the rich man dies too.
- ▶ Herein lies the overturned applecart of expectations in the parable. Everything changes. Roles are reversed. Lazarus is on the inside and the rich man is out.
- ▶ Lazarus situation is described in glorious detail much like the opulence of the rich man was described. The imagery is rich. Angels carry poor Lazarus to the bosom of Abraham.
- ▶ Lazarus rested at Abraham's side and the rich man was dead, buried and languishing in Hades—the underworld.
- ▶ Lazarus name reflected his earthly condition—poverty stricken and in need of God's help, help he now enjoyed in lavish splendor at the bosom of Abraham.
- ▶ One is not to understand this parable as an apologetic against riches and rich people. Abraham was also rich.
- ▶ Lazarus asked Abraham, the biblical patron saint of hospitality due to the hospitality he showed the strangers at Mamre, if the rich man could be offered a drink of water. Lazarus request stood in opposition to the rich man who should have offered hospitality to Lazarus but failed in his responsibility to do so.
- ▶ The difference between the rich man's opulent life on earth and his indigent after-life is depicted by his request for a drop of water. The parable is not intended to posit a theology of heaven and hell. It is only intended to show the reversal of roles before and after death for the poor rich man.
- ▶ There was nothing he could do to change his plight. Repentance was no longer possible.
- ▶ Jewish listeners would have been indignant over the fact that the man was not warned to do the right thing. The point of the parable is that the man would not have responded anyway.
- ▶ The point of the parable is that there are no distinctions in the reign of God. Everyone is equal and in loving communion with one another.
- ▶ The parable also challenges the prevalent belief that a person's wealth was a sign of God's pleasure or displeasure. Conversion of heart and covenant, reciprocal relationship with God is the way in which a person finds favor with God.
- ▶ One thing is certain—those who neglect their responsibility to the poor certainly are not considered righteous in the eyes of God.

- ▶ The self-righteous and the arrogant will find their roles reversed in the hereafter.
- ▶ Believers are to follow the law and the prophets in this life out of reciprocal covenant relationship with God. If they fail to do so and choose to ignore the command to care for the poor and oppressed, then there is not much chance they will succeed in the afterlife either.
- ▶ The parable is a challenge to be in solidarity with those in this world who are on the outside looking in—those outside the gate.
- ▶ The challenge is to open the gate and for both sides to be in solidarity with one another. The kingdom of God opens the gate and all are welcomed in.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ In what way is this a relevant word for us today?
- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ Put yourself in the place of the rich man. How would you feel about your predicament? What are the implications for those of us who think we are rich in some sense or another (keeping in mind the poorest among us are probably richer than most people in Third World countries)?
- ▶ What are the attitudes that lead to the rich man's reversal of fortunes? What can be done for us to avoid such attitudes?
- ▶ In what way are you presently living up to God's covenant with his faithful people? In what way are you caring for the poor and oppressed in your world? If not, what can you do to change that?
- ▶ Consider Lazarus. Now consider the illegal immigrants in our country who are here in hopes of carving a better life and to feed their families. How do you suppose this parable would address their situation and our response to it?
- ▶ In what way is your parish community responding to today's Gospel?
- ▶ What does today's Gospel teach you about God and God's relationship with human beings?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in your way of living the challenges of this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this parable teach us about living in the kingdom of God?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

#1. As a director of liturgy I am often aware of the pomp and circumstance, the effort, the amazing time, talent and stewardship that goes into the liturgies we celebrate. I often recall the words of the prophets in which God tells the people that he hates their liturgy—he wants their hearts—not their sacrifices.

God hated their liturgy when they lost their focus and the reason for it in the first place—honor, praise and worship of God for his steadfast love and kindness. The covenant they shared with God demanded response and that response was to care for God's creation and for the poor.

It is therefore important for me/us to reflect on the purpose of liturgy—to similarly give thanks and praise to God. If it does not transform us, it is nothing more than self-absorption and idolatry. How do we know if it has transformed us? We look at the fruits. Do people truly leave the Sunday assembly with the intention to love and serve the Lord? Are God's people served by God's people? If not, we are not transformed and his kingdom has not been established in our midst. That indictment, then, is on our heads.

Evidence that the people in our community are transformed and challenged by the liturgy is observed in the myriad of ways that God's people are served in our community. I thank God I am part of a community that takes its responsibility seriously. A parish can boast of the best liturgies in town, but if there is no ministry, service, or outreach to the poor in that parish God must echo the words of the prophets, "I hate your liturgies, I want your heart and soul. When you fail to serve my people, you fail to serve me."

#2. Every year during the Easter season we all renew our baptismal profession of faith. We promise to recommit our lives to Christ and to live our baptismal faith. One Lent we spent an entire season reflecting on what it means to renew our baptism. Homilies were preached and every small group in the parish reflected on the implications of what it means to truly embrace our baptismal calling to live as priest to serve God's people, prophet to proclaim God's word by word and deed and king to lead people to Christ.

When it came time for the community to renew our baptismal profession of faith at Easter, there was a sense in the community that we truly knew and were passionate about the profession we were making. The church was filled with heart-felt sound as we shouted our "I dos" at the questions that were being posed to us.

We reflected on the implications of that commitment for an entire season. The experience was a wonderful reminder that the outreach and evangelization that takes place in the parish is undergirded by a sound liturgical, doctrinal and spiritual theology that defines who we are. It was a renewal of conversion for all of us.

#3. One afternoon a young man sat in our church weeping. He was from Mexico and came over here to find work to support his aging parents. There was no work in his hometown or anywhere nearby. He was a faithful employer. He followed all the laws. He tried to forge a path to citizenship and was working toward that goal. His boss just fired him telling him that he was too afraid to keeping him on the payroll.

The young man was afraid of being deported. His parents were now dead and the employment situation in his home area was worse than when he left. Like Lazarus he had nothing left.

Furthermore, he was asking for nothing, all he wanted was a Bible in Spanish so he could speak to God in his own language. Here was a Lazarus in front of me and I could do nothing to give him what he needed. I could give him love and compassion and something to eat for that day.

How many Lazarus are there in our midst? Our country has been given an opportunity to do what the Law of God commands, yet we appeal to man-made laws and arrogant self-righteousness and refuse to help immigrants who seek a better life for their families. Yes, the situation brings many problems. However, I would rather err on the side of compassion and help God's children feed their families.

An email recently went out to our parishioners by other parishioners that extremely saddened me and that I found antithetical to the Gospel. There was a picture of a passageway in the desert littered with suitcases and the carnage of people traveling in haste to reach this country. The message in the email was a message of disgust for the mess that was created and the crime that they were bringing to our country.

Perhaps the Christian response was to see behind the carnage a people oppressed and in sojourn—traveling to the Promised Land hoping to secure a future for their families. The picture also failed to tell the story of the many who died trying to reach their destination. God is truly watching our response to his poor children. I hope we do not find ourselves like Lazarus—begging for a cool sip of water.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Stewardship
Baptism
Evangelization
Catholic Social Teaching

Heaven, Hell and Purgatory
Sin and Grace
Eucharistic Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

STEWARDSHIP

The readings today continue the issue of stewardship and care for the poor. Amos chastises the people for failure to be good stewards of God's creation and care for God's poor ones. The Gospel highlights the importance of caring for the poor—there are consequences when we don't. The liturgy invites believers to embrace their God-ordained responsibility toward the poor. Thus today would be a most appropriate time to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about STEWARDSHIP.

BAPTISM

1 Timothy makes reference to a baptismal profession of faith, a profession we all make at baptism and which we annually renew. Baptism is an ongoing call to live the priestly, prophetic and royal mission of Christ. This reading is an invitation to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the sacrament of BAPTISM.

EVANGELIZATION

Today's Gospel is an important reminder that we are called to share the good News of the Kingdom. The rich man failed in his responsibility; it is too late for him. We are therefore compelled to go out and invite others to live the Good News and establish the reign of God. Thus, today our focus will be on what the Church teaches about EVANGELIZATION.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Today's liturgy reminds us of God's command that we care for poor and oppressed people in the world. The Catholic Catechism, #1033 states "Our Lord warns us that we shall be separated from him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones who are his brethren". It is not simply a nice thing to do—it is at the heart of what

it means to call ourselves Christian. Caring for those who are disadvantaged is our response to the covenant God has forged with us—we can do no less than respond to God’s people with love, charity and justice. Today’s liturgy is an excellent opportunity to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

ESCHATOLOGY or END TIMES: HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

Today’s Gospel, while not directly a theme about the afterlife, does address it. The rich man experiences the consequences of a life not lived in accord with God’s Law. Hades, the place of torment is not considered hell in the sense we understand hell. However, the allusion to the afterlife in the parable is an opportunity for us to reflect on the afterlife—what we believe about it. Thus today we will focus our attention in the doctrinal session on ESCHATOLOGY or END TIMES: HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

SIN AND GRACE

Today’s first reading is a reminder that our choices have consequences. Amos preached to the northern kingdom about their refusal to live the covenant. He insisted that the defeat of Israel is a direct result of their arrogance, sin and refusal to live according to the covenant. The Gospel reminds us that God is merciful and is always ready to offer mercy to those who seek it. Today’s liturgy is an invitation to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about grace and sin.

EUCCHARIST SERIES

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.